

HOW TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF CHRIST'S IMMINENT RETURN

INTRO: For 4000 years, God's people waited for the Messiah, the Deliverer God had promised when Adam and Eve fell into sin. And the book of Galatians says that in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son. The long awaited Messiah had finally come. We have just come past commemorating His birth.

But the sad fact is that most of God's people failed to recognize Him when He did come. They had failed to read and study and heed the Word of God, and now they failed to recognize Him and they rejected Him and crucified Him. And three days and three nights later, an event happened, that was to have a profound impact on the entire world, though it was denied right from the start. Jesus Christ, the Messiah was resurrected! And for 40 days He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. And after 40 days, while He stood on the Mount of Olives, after He had given His disciples some instructions on what to do, He ascended up to heaven. And Scripture tells us that there, He sits on the right hand of God, waiting until His enemies will be made His footstool.

And after He ascended to heaven, His disciples went into Jerusalem to an upper room and waited as Jesus had told them to do. And while they were waiting for the promise Jesus had made to them, that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit not many days from then, one of Judaism's high holy days took place. It is the day we call Pentecost. And when the day of Pentecost had fully come, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

And these disciples were given the gift of speaking in tongues. Some day, not too long from now I want to speak on this subject and make available a booklet I have written on the phenomena of speaking in tongues. It is my view that these disciples were given the miraculous ability to understand and speak in languages they had never learned. And on this feast, one of the three on which all Jewish men were to appear in Jerusalem, they were able to share the account of the death burial and resurrection of Christ in all the foreign languages represented there. So, all these

different nationalities gathered there heard, each in their own language, the wonderful works of God.

And that very day, a new entity came into being, an entity we know as the Church. And this Church, this *ekkleesia*, was chosen by God to be the bride of His only Son, Jesus Christ. And some day very soon, I believe, this Church will caught up according to the Scriptures to become the wife of Christ. This wedding will be the wedding of all weddings, and this bride is the bride of all brides. Paul Washer rightly calls this bride *pristine*. She is right now, and ever will be beautiful. No bride will ever match this bride!

Now, you see, in Jewish weddings in Jesus' day, the betrothal came first. Then the bridegroom went home to prepare a place for his bride. Then some time later, usually about a year, though the bride never knew exactly when, he would return and take her to His father's house and there the wedding would be completed and she would stay with her bridegroom at her Father's house. Today, we, the bride, the Church; are between the time the Church was betrothed and when He will return for His bride. Very soon He will come for her. And as the bride of Christ, I want to give us three words of instruction as to what we are to do while we wait for Him. There is no doubt in my mind, that the fullness of the time for His return is imminent, very imminent!

I. WAIT (FOR HIM)

The first word I want to give as to what we are to be doing while His return tarries, is that we are to *wait* for Him. I would like you to turn to 1 Thessalonians 1 for the word for our first point. You see, Paul had come to preach the Gospel to the Thessalonians just a few years earlier, a place that was spiritually devoid of any understanding of Jesus as the way, the truth and the life; and a very dark and sinful place. Almost every kind of vice could be found at Thessalonica. It was typical of a place under the rule of Rome. Idolatry was rife. They were committing almost every conceivable sin. Then Paul came and told them about Jesus Christ. And God did a great wonder. A number of these godless Gentiles were convicted of their sins. They repented of their idolatry and trusted in Christ and they became a very

strong Christian witness throughout the entire region so much so that Paul did not have to go to many of the surrounding areas to witness. So look at verses 8-10 (read).

Now note carefully that they turned to God and they turned from idols. That is conversion! And if ever there was a church instructed on the return of Christ, it was this church. You can read it all through both books written to the Thessalonians. These new converts from paganism had a greater understanding of the imminent return of Christ than the majority of the Church today that has had the entire NT now for almost 2000 year!

And I want you to notice what they did after they got saved. Verse 10 tells us they *waited* for God's Son Jesus Christ from heaven! The English word 'to wait' means *to stay or remain in expectation*. And here it is the expectation of Christ's return for His bride. Consider the Jewish wedding I mentioned earlier, for a moment. The bride and groom have been betrothed. The wedding agreement has been made. The groom has gone back to his father's house to prepare a place for her. And now some time has passed and the bride is *waiting* in anticipation for the shout that the bridegroom is arriving! She is *waiting*! Not even at night does she fully rest because she knows her bridegroom could come at even at night. You see, when once the bridegroom was on his way, no amount of trouble on the way would hinder him from taking his bride that day if at all possible, even if he were delayed until midnight! And so, she was waiting.

Scripture asks, "Can a woman forget her nursing child? Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" And the answer is a resound, "No!" But God says in Jeremiah 2:32, "Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number!" And I wonder, would Jesus say, "Yet My bride has forgotten My imminent return days without number?"

Now let us consider just such a slothful bride. Her dress is not ready. And she is absorbed with all kinds of other things. She is not paying attention that her bridegroom might be there any day. Is such a thing possible? I have observed a good number of

brides. I have not yet seen such a thing! I have seen the anticipation grow. I have not yet seen it diminish. But could it be that this might be happening in the Church? Could that bride who has a bridegroom such as never yet has been, have forgotten He is coming soon?

How should we live in light of Christ's soon return? Our anticipation should be growing as the day draws nearer. We should be waiting with outstretched necks. Someone told me recently of one preacher's greatest disappointment in 2011. It was that Christ had not come. I know one thing about that preacher. He was waiting! So as we close this point, listen to Hebrews 9:28, "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation"!

II. WATCH FOR HIM

But there is another thing the Church is to be doing while she waits for her Bridegroom. Go with me to the thirteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel (read 32-37). What is the word to believers? Watch. We are to watch for Him! To watch means to stay awake and alert. And the reason given why we should be watching is because He might come at any time! If someone cannot come for another month, you do not watch for them until the time draws near. Then you begin to watch. When someone's arrival is imminent, you must watch at all times.

Now I want you to see in Luke's Gospel chapter 21 what we are to watch (read 34-36). Now, what are we to watch? Are we to be looking at the skies or the stars or the clouds, so that we won't miss it when He comes? Well, Luke answers this question for us in verse 34. He says, "Take heed to your hearts! Watch your hearts! Not the skies!" Here is what can happen according to our text, our hearts can be weighed down with carousing and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and if that happens, this day can come upon us unexpectedly and the results can be disastrous.

Now these words translated *carousing* and *drunkenness* need careful study. Some translations give for the word translated 'carousing' in the NKJV the word 'dissipation'. It is excessive indulgence in foods or

pleasures. Then the word translated *drunkenness* here is the word *methee*. It does not necessarily mean to get drunk, as is often thought. It means to drink to the full. Of course, if that drink happens to be alcoholic, then one would be drunk. But this word does not mean drunk of itself. What we have here is excessive eating and drinking and being caught up with the temporal life pleasures.

Matthew talks about the days of Noah, and how they were eating and drinking. There we have two entirely different words. That was normal life. Here, in Mark, both words refer to excessive eating and drinking. It is to be caught up with eating and drinking. And along with excessive eating and drinking, Luke adds the cares of this life. And what are these? These are all those things we legitimately need to live. But here is what happens. We get involved in looking after the cares of this life; groceries, clothing, housing, vehicles etc... etc... and our hearts get weighed down with these things. And what happens then? We lose sight of the importance of what life is really all about. We lose sight of the fact that today Jesus might come, and thus we forget about what is really important. And then what happens is that one thing leads to another, and our hearts get weighed down. And Luke tells us what will happen when Jesus comes suddenly, unexpectedly. These people will be caught by surprise!

Watch! That is our word. We are to *wait* for our Lord as a bride waits for her bridegroom. Then we are to *watch*, because if we get carried away with things, no matter how legitimate those things may be, they may derail us from what is really important!

Luke tells us what will happen when Jesus returns for the Church. This day will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the earth! But for those who watch, this day will not take them off guard. They will be prepared. They have been waiting. They have been watching their hearts and they long for His return!

Now consider yet just briefly verse 36. "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to

pass, and that you will be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man!" Now there is a very strong implication in these words. It is this. When the Son of Man comes, there will be some who have failed to watch, and they will not be counted worthy to escape what is coming and they will not be counted worthy to stand before the Son of Man! So, how important is this word, "Watch!"?

Now consider 1 John 3:2-3. Listen to it: "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." You see, if we are waiting expectantly for Christ and if we are watching for Him, we will not allow ourselves to become ensnared in earthly things, and we will be purifying ourselves, just like a bride, awaiting the imminent return of her groom.

So, how should we live in light of Christ's soon return? We should be watching! We must watch ourselves. Let me ask you, do the cares of this life weigh your heart down so that spiritual things are taking a back seat? This morning is a wake-up call. Set your house in order, for the next thing you may be sleeping, spiritually.

III. WORK FOR HIM

But I want to give us one more word of instruction on how to live in light of Christ's soon return. We have seen that we are to *wait* for Him, that is to stay or remain in expectation of His return. Second, we are to *watch*, to remain awake and alert spiritually, and not get drunk and drowsy with the cares of this life. And now third, we are to *work* while we wait and watch. In light of our previous point, it is very easy to begin working for ourselves. We can easily get caught up with temporal things such as eating and drinking, and letting the pleasures and the cares of this life weigh our hearts down. And in time, we can find ourselves in danger of failure to watch and be awake.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, that we considered earlier, says that the Thessalonians turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God. While they were expectantly waiting, they served the living and true God! They were waiting, but they were serving, or working.

In Luke 19 Jesus gives a parable of a man who went into a far country. So he called 10 of his servants and gave them all 10 minas, each mina being about 3 months salary and he said, "Do business till I come." The KJV says, "Occupy till I come." I think there is some indication here that when Christ ascended to heaven, He would be gone for some time, but in light of that his return was imminent, depending on when he got the kingdom for Himself. And the clear instruction is that while He was away, His servants were to be about His work. In the Church, the Lord has given various abilities to every one of His people, and according to their abilities, they are to be occupied. The idea is that while we are *waiting* and *watching* for Him, they ought to be occupied by *working* for Him.

Let me show you that from another passage, and at the same time explain, what may otherwise be a bit of a difficult passage. Turn to Acts 1 (read 6-8). At the time of this event, the disciples were as yet unaware that in 10 days, God would begin a new work. This new work would be the Church. And they are wondering if the Lord will now restore the kingdom to Israel. This is the same thing we saw in Luke 19. This would be the time we know as the millennium. And Jesus says, "It is not given to you to know the times or the seasons."

Now we need to understand what He has said, and I cannot deal with it in this message for the sake of time. Another time I want to deal with the meaning of this text. Let me here just say that it does not mean what Rick Warren says it means. Of Acts 1:7, Rick Warren says on page 285 of the book, "The Purpose Driven Life", "He (i.e., Jesus) said in essence, 'The details of my return are none of your business.'"

Let me here just briefly say that the phrase times and seasons occurs only three times in the Bible, and

I believe it refers to the time before the rapture. I have not time to show that here. But it basically is saying the same thing Jesus said when He said, "No one knows the hour of My return." No one knows how long the Church age will last. No one knows what amount of time will pass before the Lord returns for His bride. And since that is the case, it brings us to the instruction of verse 8, and the reason why I use this text here.

So, having told the disciples that the times and seasons are not revelations given to us, that is regarding the duration of the Church age, therefore He says in verse 8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." It seems clear that Jesus viewed that He would be gone for some time at least before He returned. And the point here is that while He is gone, they are to be about doing His business and His business is now the Church's business. It is being witnesses.

In Luke 19, Jesus instructed, "Occupy till I come." Now He tells them what that occupation is. Just before Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the last time, and just before He ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, He gave some very important instructions to His disciples. He was on a mountain in the Galilee area. And He said to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Someone has said that Jesus was either a liar, or He was a lunatic, or He is Lord! My wife and I like to travel. We like to do it by involving as little money as possible. So, she signs a video out during the week on winter days and in the evenings we watch it. It is absolutely amazing what man has done on earth. We have watched Italy and now recently Germany and Greece. Man has left his mark here on earth with some incredible building feats. When the Lord Jesus was on

earth He built no buildings, governed no country and wrote no books. He was born in a barn, grew up doing carpentry work in a no-man's land, and then traveled over this Gentile inhabited area and some of the rest of this small land of Israel teaching anyone that would listen to Him. And then He was crucified. And I do not care if you are an atheist or a believer in Buddhism or Hinduism or a Muslim; what any objective student of man's history must admit, no one; but no one has more profoundly impacted the history of this world more than Jesus Christ!

And now in Acts 1:8, He ascended to heaven with these few words of instruction to a Church that had not yet been formed, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Well, you understand that here in La Crete, Alberta we are at the ends of the earth. I know that because Warren Smith said so when he was here. He said when he flew in that little airplane to High Level from Edmonton, he looked down out of that little airplane at this vast expanse of land and he said, 'to the ends of the earth.' Well, we live there, at the ends of the earth, and we have a job to do here. We have a young couple here that want to give of their lives to tackle one of the most difficult tasks they could possibly take on. We need to all be in prayer for them.

What is our word here? First, we said we are to wait for the Lord's return. Second, we said we were to watch for the Lord's return. And now, the word is, "Work until He returns!" We have a mission. The Lord is building His Church and he is using all of us, as Christians, to do it. Let us be about it!

My wife and I viewed a lot of castles in Germany. They are build up on some high peak of rock, and they are made up of many, many quarried rocks. The Lord Jesus is building His Church. It too is being built on a Rock, and it too is made up of stones, only they are living stones. If you are truly born again, you are a living stone in His Church, and no stone is insignificant. Janitor, pastor, social committee,

deacon; every job is part of it. We have a task to do.

Paul Washer did a message called 10 Indictments Against the Modern Church. And one of those indictments was regarding the Church. Here is what he said, "Jesus gave his life for the Church, a beautiful virgin, pristine Church. If you want to give your life for something in the ministry, give it to the Church, to a church, a body of believers, a local congregation."

Let me ask you, are you at work? Our time is short. Our work is great. You need not be at work in this church, but you should be at work in some local church. And I want to tell you that every work counts. You may say, "I just do janitor work. Does that count?" If God called you to that and you are doing it for Him, not to get saved, but to further His kingdom, Yes, every work counts! No work is unimportant!

CONCL: And this morning, I want to tell you, that if you are not part of that beautiful bride, the Church, you are living in danger every moment of your life. You are flirting with the devil and as soon as he gets the right to your life, he will snuff out your life and it will be forever too late for you. And if the Lord Jesus should come before you repent and believe in Him, you will suffer the torments of hell. Life is very, very serious.

And for the believer, while we wait for the bridegroom to come take us to His Father's house, we need to be waiting in constant expectation of His return. Then we are to remain spiritually awake and alert. We are to be constantly watching. And third, we are to be occupied right until He comes! We do not work to get saved. We are to work because we are already saved. It is the saved who are called to this work, so let us, those who name the name of Christ, be about His work!